

Interactive comment on “Assessing the Statistical Uniqueness of the Younger Dryas: A Robust Multivariate Analysis” by Henry Nye and Alan Condron

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All text is copied from RC2, and the authors' comments are preceded by "Response:".

General comments:

The paper by Nye and Condon applies statistical analysis to metrics derived from ice core data ($\delta^{18}\text{O}$, CH_4 , CO_2) spanning a large group of abrupt climate shifts between 120-11 thousand years ago. The procedure PCOut, essentially a form of principal component analysis that is particularly suited for outlier identification, is relatively novel for paleoclimatology studies. The results are interpreted to mean the

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BøllingAllerød/ Younger Dryas is not statistically different from 24 other preceding Dansgaard-Oeschger events during the last glacial period in terms of the specific metrics they C1 CPD Interactive comment Printer-friendly version Discussion paper derived from the ice core data (specifically, stadial slope and magnitude of peak-to-trough change). The authors conclude that future work should not focus on identifying a unique cause for the YD cold event, suggesting that similar mechanism(s) may have controlled all of the interstadial-to-stadial transitions in the past.

The manuscript is well written, and the analyses and results are very clearly presented. Researchers will be able to repeat this work or apply the techniques to other datasets, thanks to the clear presentation of the methods. I have no issues with the analysis itself, save for a few minor comments listed below. I do, however, think the underlying motivation for the study – the notion that the paleoclimate community considers the cause of the YD event unique from other D-O/ stadial transitions - is overstated throughout the manuscript. Yes, there are studies proposing “one-off” causal mechanisms; for example, there is a large body of literature debating the bolide impact hypothesis. But many researchers think the reason the YD is unique is not because of its cause necessarily, but because it occurred during the last deglaciation, a sort of “failed” transition back to glacial conditions. Or, by the same token, D-O events were “failed” deglaciations that for some reason reverted to glacial conditions. The YD is also unique because similar “reversals” toward glacial conditions did not occur during other terminations of the last 800,000 years. The authors’ analysis does not consider these aspects, which to me are more fundamental qualities that make the YD unique, more so than the shapes and slopes of the ice core data themselves. If the authors disagree with this assessment, they should make a stronger case in the introduction for why it should be proven the YD is or is not statistically different from other D-O cycles. More specifically, the authors should specify why their outlier test on only three specific metrics – i.e., stadial slope, median, and peak-to-trough magnitude – is a sufficient test of whether the YD is or is not unique. Is there reason to believe these metrics should look statistically different if the YD was in fact caused by something different than other stadial transitions?

Furthermore, I am not fully convinced that the results support the conclusions. The PCOut results in Table 4 show (at face value, at least) that the YD is statistically significantly different from other D-O events. That is, there are 64 instances of yes while only 41 instances of no, and the first column of Table 4 (the all metrics evaluation) points overwhelmingly to outlier status for the BA/YD. The authors' explanation for the median results is that there is significant offset from the rest of the glacial period, but this is precisely why I find the YD is unique and interesting in the first place - not because it looks different from other events in terms of the data, but because it occurred during a deglaciation. That being said, the authors do provide a very clear and thorough discussion of the most interesting aspects of the statistics, which convinced me that the BA/YD is not unique in terms of its expression in NGRIP d18O and CH₄. It is useful to point out the statistical likenesses between the BA/YD and other D-O events, as they have done, and I think this paper should be published for this reason, as well as for the reason that the statistical technique is potentially useful for other studies.

I think the manuscript would greatly benefit from revisions such that the paper emphasizes the statistical method rather than the (to me) unsurprising result that the YD is not unique from other stadial events in terms of a few certain patterns resolved in the ice core data. For example, the paper might present the YD/BA as an interesting application of the method, but not an absolute test of YD uniqueness. The description of the method could be bolstered by describing how PCOut might be used for other paleoclimate work, or how it could be adapted to deal with age and measurement uncertainties that are inherent to most paleo datasets. In addition, please see specific comments and technical corrections listed below.

Response: Thank you for your very thoughtful comments. We strongly agree that the result of statistical uniqueness in the NGRIP d18O and CH₄ records should be emphasized over the overall uniqueness of the BA/YD with respect to other events. In regards to your first comments, we believe that there is significant treatment of the BA/YD as a unique event in the literature, and seek to broaden the field of considerations for what

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the BA/YD represents climatologically. In particular, we find it notable that an event so similar in shape to the classic notion of a DO event can occur at a time of deglaciation.

In our revised manuscript, we will emphasize these thoughts in addition to the second meta-purpose of this study, which is to introduce more robust algorithmic outlier detection techniques into the field of paleoclimatology. Indeed, we consider our methods to be incredibly useful when attempting to synthesize and compare climate records that are both uncertain and complex.

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Specific comments:

Line 6-7: Freshwater forcing of circulation due to meltwater from ice sheets or iceberg discharge has been proposed as the cause of stadials during the last glacial period as well, not just for the YD.

Response: Noted, this will be corrected.

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Lines 58-59: Can you provide any objective reason for choosing these durations? What makes them conservative?

Response: We choose these durations simply because they are at the shorter end of what has previously been accepted as the length of a stadial or interstadial. They are conservative in relation to the Rasmussen et al., 2014 study, which contains many events are that sub-centennial in length. It should also be noted that our results are not very sensitive to the chosen length, and this will be noted in our revision.

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Line 65: Can you show or say what happens to your final results if you do the extreme scenarios – (1) merge all sub-events into single events, (2) discard all sub-events and only look at the main events, and (3) include all sub-events as their own individual

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events? This could be in a supplementary section.

Response: Yes. We can certainly perform this analysis for inclusion and discussion in the supplementary section of our revised manuscript.

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Lines 74-77: What exactly do “normalize” and “centered” mean in this context?

Response: These lines refer to the creation of Figure 5. “Centering” these time series at their median means computing and subtracting the median value of each record during each DO event, and “normalizing” means stretching or shrinking the time over which each DO event occurred to a consistent number of years for each. These methods allow us to better visualize and compare the shape of each DO event. In our revision we will make it clear precisely what we are referring to in this context.

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Lines 74-77: It is unclear if the “narrowing down” of D-O events applies to the statistical analysis or not. Did you effectively screen the number of events this way? Can you either describe or provide a figure to demonstrate how you narrowed them down, given that this step was done subjectively by eye. Please also state how many events you kept/excluded based on the criteria of visually resembling the BA/YD, assuming you did screen them.

Response: This process does not apply to the statistical analysis that follows it, and we will make this clear in our revision. But, rather, this serves as preliminary evidence for the fact that the BA/YD’s shape in the context of the Greenland records is not unique in terms of the general shape of many DO events. Visually selecting 7 out of 25 DO events that appear indistinguishable in shape from the BA/YD evidences a similarity and a motivation for the following statistical study. We are aware that performing our subsequent analysis on only 8 DO events is not a rigorous test, so use all 25 DO events.

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Lines 74-77: Another comment here, and I am assuming that the visual selection of events that you described was used as a screen for the statistical analysis (if not, then disregard the following but please simply reword so it is clear in the text). If so, however, this step would strike me as a major weakness of your analysis. The overall conclusions is that the YD/BA is not statistically distinct from other D-O events in terms of shape, structure, and the other metrics described, but in this selection step you intentionally chose to only look at D-O events that visually resemble the YD/BA in the first place? Please address to what degree the selection criteria influence the final statistical result.

Response: N/A, it is not a screen. Our revised manuscript will make sure this section of our methods is much clearer.

Lines 91-93: Do you have to identify D-O behavior by these criteria for the analysis? I thought you already identified them using the algorithm and the visual resemblance to the BA/YD. If you are just describing the characteristics of D-O behavior, you might change the wording to reflect this so readers are not confused.

Response: Our methods follow two strains of logic: the first concerns the visual selection of 7 DO events to provide evidence for the BA/YD's visual similarity to nearly one third of other DO events studied. Our second, more important line of analysis is that which takes the peak-to-trough, slope, and median measurement in order to implement the PCOut procedure. Both of these analyses are preceded by the algorithmic selection of DO events found in Figure 2. The distinction between different parts of our methods will be made much more clear in the revised manuscript.

Lines 138-140: Again, I don't follow why. Is this just for ease of visualization, or is this related somehow to the statistical analysis? Please state so if that is the case.

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Response: Yes, correct. We will make it explicitly clear in our revision that this is just for ease of visualization.

Figure 5 – Is the “BA/YD exclusive mean” the mean of all 24 other D-O events, or just the 7 shown? Please clarify. Additionally, are you sure that the “BA/YD exclusive mean” in the fourth panel (second column, second row) is the mean of EDML d18O? My understanding is this is supposed to be the EDML mean of the 7 events (or 24?), but excluding the BA/YD. . . It doesn’t look like the mean of the other colored lines in that panel, and it looks more sawtooth shaped than the normal phasing of Antarctic temperature with respect to the onset of D-O events. Perhaps there is a mistake.

Response: The “BA/YD exclusive mean” is the mean of just the 7 D-O events shown, and our revised manuscript will explore the possibility of changing this mean to reflect the average of all 24 other DO events. The mean of the EDML is incorrect, thank you for spotting that. It will be corrected in our revision.

General technical corrections:

There are numerous places in the text where the term “D-O event” is used somewhat loosely to describe a warming event in the NGRIP ice core record, a cold stadial that follows the warming, or the combination of both warm and cold intervals. Technically the D-O events are just the warming events as they are expressed in the Greenland isotope records.

Response: Noted, these will be corrected such that D-O events only refer to the warmings.

Specific technical corrections:

Figure 1: The transitions to stadial conditions are marked, but not the transitions to interstadials (i.e. the onset of the D-O events). It is a little confusing when you refer to a specific D-O event. You might consider distinguishing whole interstadial periods versus stadial periods with shading, as in Figure 1 of Rasmussen {Rasmussen, 2014 #751}.

Response: Thank you for this note. For our revised manuscript we will look at different ways of plotting the data so that interstadial periods and stadial periods are easily distinguished.

Lines 17-19: Needs a reference.

Response: Indeed, thank you. In our revision, we will reference Li and Born (2019) for this.

Line 39: Suggest changing “paleoclimate research” to “future work.”

Response: Yes, this phrase will be altered in our revised manuscript.

Line 48: Do you mean, “labeled by lowercase letters” in Rasmussen 2014? Please clarify. Line 67: “of a well-defined and complete record for all four of our chosen proxies, as we restrict our analysis of the last glacial cycle to. . .”

Response: Yes, this is what we mean. We’ll make clear that this labeling comes from the Rasmussen 2014 paper.

Line 76: “NGRIP d18O,” rather than “NGRIP d18”

Response: Thank you, this will be changed.

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Line 106: I am being picky here, but two of the four records – NGRIP CH4 and composite CO2 - are not proxies, they are direct measurements.

Response: Correct. The revised manuscript will reflect the correct language for these data. —

Line 109: The word “remaining” is confusing to me here? Should it say “resulting,” since the components are the result of the principle component analysis?

Response: Indeed, “resulting” is more intuitive. This change will be made.

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Equation 1: In reading Filzmoser 2008, I noticed that equation (1) in this manuscript is different from equation (11) in Filzmoser, which has a fourth power in the denominator. However, I also notice the Filzmoser equation (11) is missing a parenthesis in the numerator. Perhaps the fault is in Filzmoser 2008 and not in this manuscript? Please clarify.

Response: The missing parenthesis in the numerator of Filmozer equation (11) should indeed be present. We have, however, forgotten to include the fourth power in our equation (1) denominator. Thank you for noticing, this will be corrected.

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Lines 117-120: Consider dividing this long sentence into two sentences for readability.

Response: Certainly, thank you.

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Equation 4: Would be helpful to define M and c immediately after equation 4, not after describing calculation of bi.

Response: Thank you, this will be changed.

—
Line 138: I think it should be “BA/YD,” not BA/YA. There are other instances of this typo throughout.

Response: This typo will be corrected everywhere it occurs, thank you.

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Line 145: I disagree with calling the data a CH₄ “proxy.” A proxy is when you measure one thing, and the data mean something else – like d₁₈O and temperature. In the case of CH₄, it’s a true measurement of the CH₄ concentration in the atmosphere in the past, rather than a proxy for it.

Response: Indeed, thank you for this clarification. Our revised language will better reflect this fact.

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Figure 3: There are some typos in caption and legend.

Response: Noted, thank you. These will be corrected in our revision.

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Figure 4: Consider numbering the panels, or make them look more distinct. I originally thought the top right panel was panel 2. The arrows are not helpful as they are currently displayed because it took me too long to realize they point to the next step in the procedure. Table 1 caption: “different” rather than “difference.” By “point of departure” do you mean “preferred parameter choices used in the statistical analysis?”

Response: For our revised manuscript we will produce a clearer version of Figure 4; in particular we will emphasize the fact that each panel in Figure 4 is labeled by the equation it corresponds to, and change the “point of departure” phrase such that it clearly describes our preferences.

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